

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'n' Doria', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border. The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'n' and a long, sweeping underline.

**One Woman's Fight
To Die Her Own Way**

By **Andréa Dorea**

Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith

Notes

1. A pharmaceutical research laboratory owned by the petrochemical conglomerate Elf Aquitaine.
2. A “protocol” is a set of regulations governing the treatment of cancer. In the case of chemotherapy, for instance, the specific products that may be prescribed and their dosages are all strictly laid down.
3. It is interesting how often medicine uses the same vocabulary as the penal system. Tumors are overcome not so much by being treated as by being punished. They are described as resistant, rebellious. What is bad must be put to death, evil powers must be extirpated. Cells are delinquent, if not possessed. You are malignant, therefore you die! The Devil, as always, is not far off!
4. Beginning in the summer of 1987, the political police, with assistance from different branches of the judicial police, undertook a systematic and wide-ranging investigation of our group, known as *Os Cangaceiros*, with a view to breaking it up. Naturally this caused us not a few problems.
5. To my readers I have no counsel to offer in this regard. No two cases are the same. I have seen women perfectly well after twenty years of remission; and I knew a woman with exactly the same clinical picture as me who died very much more quickly. I can only speak of my own experience, and I do not want to suggest that it is in any way typical. A cancer of the cervix or a cancer of the prostate, if removed early on, may well be eradicated for good. The time factor is very important, and the earlier a tumor is caught the better your chances.

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The English translation of *N'Dréa* was originally published by Pelagian Press. We decided to reprint this book because it is otherwise out of print and generally unavailable, and we believe that Andréa's words should live on.

This is the first printing of this edition.

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This book is for Fatima

“You must always choose the path that has heart, so as to make the best of yourself, and perhaps so as always to be able to laugh. The man of knowledge lives by acting, not by thinking about acting, and even less by thinking about what he will think when he has finished acting. The man of knowledge chooses the path with heart and follows it.”

—The Yaqui Indian

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Letter to My Nurses

November 1990

How cynical, to hand me these two sheets of paper to sign! I have not even been permitted to read the thirty-odd page report to which they refer. You come to me demanding “just a little signature” and talking about the apparently unquestionable absolute need for you to test their “new” product on me. This is the world on its head: I am supposed to assume responsibility for what would be a totally irresponsible act on my part, while at the same time releasing a drug company and a hospital from any responsibility of their own for turning me into an informed and consenting guinea-pig.

Of course — the document assures me in sibilant tones — I am “at liberty to withdraw my consent at any time, without incurring any responsibility, blah, blah, blah...” Well, hell no! That’s all I need! Who will pay for all this experimental tinkering with people’s blood cells

with the medical world — a world battering on all the cancers and other shit that it itself foists upon us. (Medicine is a great bureaucracy, and it hides its ignorance like a state secret.) As for my “copper-stases” — those living corpses who have been trailing me these last few years, without shame and without serious difficulty — they too failed to isolate me. For — yes! — my friends were behind me even when they were far away.

Even better — what luxury! what supreme pleasure! — I have contrived with my friends to organize my exit as a situation-to-be-constructed. The date of our leave-taking has been fixed. This agreed-upon moment marks a departure: at once an end and a beginning. I shall be part of the future of my comrades — shall partake of their collective decisions. I say “we” though I speak of a time when I shall be no more. It is not hard to relativize the commonly accepted view of death.

This more or less arbitrarily chosen date should be looked upon as a qualitative threshold that we all wish to cross and that it would be sacrilege to shy from.

Our standpoint here is diametrically opposed to any idea of suicide as an isolated and desperate act that abolishes everything the individual has

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If only, during your recent strike, you had exposed the scandalous way in which human life is disregarded. You know a thing or two about it, after all. That would have been a genuinely human thing to do. And everybody would have backed you up. Because money rules, yes — but as nurses you had something different, something qualitatively different, to tell.

Please take these few lines as a token of gratitude from someone who would rather have a month of freedom than a year of chemo, all the likely consequences notwithstanding.

I want you all to know that my decision, though taken *in extremis*, has nothing perverse about it. Hope, just like despair, is a slave-master. I act neither out of despair nor out of defiance. I am just being sensible. I have to have some fresh air.

With my best regards to all the nursing and clerical staff.

N'Dréa

The mistake of the Situationists, following the millenarians, may well have been that they conceived of being as *already posited* (they thought in terms of an “elect”). Nor is it a matter of an *ought-to-be*, but rather of a being constructed by means of the greatest possible detachment. From this standpoint we can understand how greatness is to be found in the greatest simplicity.

Money is the inverse of wealth, a form that isolates and divides us: the *omnipotence of objectivity* laying down the law. It is the greatest distantiation possible, absolute detachment. Yet the subject can not achieve self-affirmation without usurping this detachment. As things stand, money is the only available mediation. The solution lies not in some new ideology but rather in practical mutual recognition. Our ambition is such that it cannot fail to support the building of friendships between us. In this active building process we shall find the meaning of what we have always sought.

Andréa Doria, 14 August 1991

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There are big bullies out there, I know, who will say that I am a loudmouth and that anyone in my condition should just pipe down; who will scoff at me for being “unable to run, can barely carry a bottle of wine, avoids all public places where a wisp of tobacco smoke might be present” — that kind of thing. I have never mixed with such people, but I have run into quite a few morons of the type who think “their” rights are the be-all and end-all. I curse them in my impotent fury and I console myself with the thought that if they were in my shoes they would shit themselves. Rather cold comfort, I'm afraid.

I am going to write R.I.P. over this Paris where you can no longer breathe. Where the

one: there is nothing particularly special about walking out of hospital before the last stage of chemotherapy. I realize that I have made a big meal out of a tiny slice of experience. But I was about to be deprived of my own death, hence of my life — which had been founded on the refusal of dispossession. By reappropriating my end I have retrieved what was at the beginning, and regained an understanding of my rebellion. I now see how my life, after childhood's song of innocence, became what it was in its essence, namely a song of experience. Under this aspect it has strategic lessons to offer.

When I rejoined my friends, I found that I was able to serve as an effective and complete mediation — something which we should all try to be and encourage each other to be. And I found I could now summon up qualities I had formerly lacked, those needed to effect my choices, to impose my will (even with my friends), to influence my entourage — in a word, to participate.

I have succeeded in communicating my experience, each of my friends has assimilated and pondered it for him or herself, and ideas have arisen amongst us that we have refined

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To get the ball rolling, I have sent a note to my nurses, dashed off in one go. By refusing to become a guinea-pig, I have saved them from having to commit two kinds of treachery: they will not need to give me false hope, nor will they need to conceal the true reason for the experimenting, which benefits the laboratories at the patient's expense. (You have to wonder how much leeway we are expected to give these special interests, especially after the failure of their two earlier protocols.) I merely wanted to remind the nurses of the little favor that I was doing them. You can bet that it wouldn't dawn on them otherwise. Everyone passes the buck, then stewes with their guilty conscience instead of getting on with the job. To tell you the truth, I had just about overdosed on their constant niceness.

Medicine's complete loss of autonomy dates back to the Second World War. The State could not afford to leave such power outside its ambit. In those days the brainwashing of rebels was performed in the bunkered secrecy of a prison or a psychiatric hospital, as a sort of ultimate experimental medical act subsequent upon forced labor and incarceration. Whenever it leaked out, such collaboration between medicine and

beginning and an end. Only on this basis can success and failure have meaning. So long as you are not deprived of this conception, you cannot be defeated. You may lose a battle now and then, but rout is an impossibility. The idea of death must be your guide — your abettor, ever on the watch, ever ready to whisper, should your attention wander, “Hey, what is that new pain... Be careful now...”

When you no longer have anything to hang on to, when you get to feel that time is running out, this idea forces you to rely solely on your decisions, and restores you to your time. You become master of your choices, of your deadlines — an accomplished strategist. Does a sense of urgency propel you forward? Yes, but that's the whole point: you are taking your time. That time belongs to you, it is fulfilling what you have chosen. Nothing else matters, nothing can be taken from you. You will even have the time to polish up your style. Everything flows logically from your initial decision. Your detachment and lucidity are enhanced; a new power is mobilized in you.

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with an in-hospital board known as the “Ethics Committee” — a self-important title which conveniently confuses the patient, who may well stake no distinction between this hospital committee and the national one. In any event, words are used to convey the exact opposite of their true meaning. Ethics indeed! We are looking at a future where medical experimentation no matter how massively pursued will always be “controlled”, and no matter how brutal will always be strictly legal. The State’s rubber stamp makes it impossible to distinguish between a citizenry made ill by the world they live in and that world itself, which views the sickness it has created as a business challenge holding out the promise of endless profits. In the long term, however, the approved research methods of today will turn out to be worse than the ills they address. Nuclear power creates tumors, which are then treated by radiation, which in turn produces tumors, and so on.

Medicine in particular and science in general no longer have any vision of the development of mankind or of the world. Their only concern is with string-and-scaling-wax solutions to

the beginning, and the beginning in the end. The finite is that point from which time is counted down, thus taking on contour, and illuminating, thanks to this motion relative to itself, the meaning of a life. Without such voluntarily established points of reference, without such promises made to oneself, life can have no meaning, can be no more than an accident.

Human action is like the movement of spirit in the world: the further it progresses towards its end, the further it regresses towards its foundation, and only in this dual movement can it discover its own unity. This slow revolution is accompanied by enlightenment. Here is the basis of the future return to a Golden Age envisaged by the millenarians, the fulfillment of the promise made at the beginning of time. “In the depths of the soul are the heavens: a pure blue cloudless sky” (Novalis).

Suppose I had died in hospital! My end — and hence my life — would have been wrested away from me. I simply could not allow my death to be stolen from me in this way, for losing the end of my life would mean losing the entire sense of that life. The essential moment, the signifying moment, would never have been mine.

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superficiality. This social degeneration has now finally affected the innermost redoubt of man's being, the "nuclei" of his cells. In the era of France's "all nuclear" energy policy, there is a distinct affinity between this dysfunctionality at the core of the living being and the disorder that rules the world. The mechanisms of breakdown are the same: circumvention of immune defenses, sabotage of communication, unilateral diversion of information, organization in the interest of the part to the detriment of the whole, regression to an undifferentiated state, uncontrolled proliferation ... until the death of the host ensues.

Cancer and not-yet-cancer, positive and negative: they are so close together, so very alike, you could almost mistake the one for the other. The tiniest bit of innocent confusion may be fatal. A tiny delayed-action bomb may be transformed into a great engine of destruction. This is terrorism for individual or family use, transmissible by means of feelings alone. Remember that with AIDS, as with cancer, emotions are a liability: to have feelings of love, hate or affection can be a mortal weakness — Big Brother is really not required. The swords of the Gladio organization might as well be melted

"THE INFINITE DOES NOT TRANSCEND THE finite", says Hegel. "Rather, it is the very movement of the finite itself." I do not know of a more revolutionary proposition.

I have sought to give weight to my life so as to lessen the burden of my death. Living without taking risks is the worst choice, for it means dying impoverished. My destiny is embodied in my life's course, as fixed by the successive refusals of my youth. Seizing the time, stealing money, reinventing social spending according to my own lights, desiring riches, knowing alienation — all in company with friends. That was my life!

I fled not a few kinds of servitude, first and foremost wage-labor. I spent fifteen years outside the law, and never went to prison. But I could not escape disease. When it came, I was certainly not about to renounce my need to appropriate my own life merely to protect myself against anxieties that could easily themselves prove fatal.

As for life itself, I cannot say that I have been badly served. Take money, for instance. Money is a terrible tyrant when you have none — but also as soon as you get your hands on some! Money can make you ill. I have experienced the best and the worst in this department.

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- The list of books to read
- In case none of the above worked, the referral to a Swiss clinic for a supervised fast costing a mere 7000 francs
- Unlimited consultations at 400 francs a pop.

The only thing missing was the pilgrimage to Lourdes!

Hard to beat the idea of a supervised fast for a terminally ill patient, wouldn't you say? If it were any cheaper, it would be hard to take the thing seriously (of course, my dear, the competition is cut-throat...).

Most of Beljanski's patients are AIDS patients, and his wretched bag of tricks resembles nothing so much as the despair he contemplates every day.

At the moment I am doing the rounds of our extended family. I hope I'll have the chance to see you and your brand-new loves, Bella. I

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IT WAS NINE MONTHS SINCE I HAD DECLINED a “last-chance” course of treatment that would have turned me into a guinea-pig in an experiment over which I had no control.

Everything was getting worse despite their “maintenance” chemotherapy. From their point of view, of course, this was a very “eloquent” fact. The nursing staff knew that I was managing to deal with the interruptions entailed by a four-day hospital stay each month only because between these sessions I would travel, and because I had quietly developed a voracious appetite for everything that life had to offer. In all likelihood they sensed that it would be very hard to get me to accept any additional constraints.

On the first day in hospital I usually had sleep to catch up on, and this time was no exception. So I was deeply asleep when they decided to come and work on my head. My chemo had to be changed immediately, I was told peremptorily, and that was that. Before I could get my eyes properly open I had had a flying visit from the medical team and an intern was already back at my bedside all ready to administer the first dose, telling me that I just had one or two papers to sign...

confrontation, specialists in “communication” (i.e., lies) are entrusted with the task of convincing patients that they need this or that particular treatment.⁸

The struggle for oneself is inseparable from an attitude of revolt towards the health-care system. The first step is systematically to question the authority of that system, and this goes hand in hand with a determination to penetrate the wall of medical secrecy and obtain whatever information it conceals concerning your own case. You must be cunning in dealing with the liars who confront you; you must always be on the qui vive, always demand copies of documents or pictures, steal as necessary, and above all never be deceived by the language of the enemy. Then, too, you must seek out other patients and exchange information with them — an approach that does not come naturally to people in hospital. This is the only way to combat the unilateral character of the decisions taken about you, which depend entirely on passivity and/or ignorance on your part.

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first gave way to doubt and increasing anxiety. I had vowed to do this, to abandon all medical treatment, but I had made that promise to myself a long time ago, and I couldn't help wondering whether the time might not yet be ripe, whether I might not be giving up too soon. On the other hand, in my case the disease always started up even more vigorously no sooner than the chemo was terminated, as I had found out as a matter of practical experience, so what was the use? Then again, perhaps it was better to die painlessly in hospital?

In short, I was drowning in a sea of unanswerable questions. Meanwhile my cough kept getting worse.

Should I leave a decision for later?

The trouble was that later I might not even be strong enough to make a decision.

In the end, on the twentieth day, I made up my mind. Stop.

The choice was not easy. The fact is, though, that for us patients there is something truly unfathomable about these treatments that make you ill. They are as incomprehensible as cancer itself. We all refer to chemotherapeutic drugs as "shit". Since Chernobyl, everyone knows that

may give up their fight against illness in order to lessen that burden. Everyone may end up hoping — albeit ambivalently, and without ever mentioning it — for the end to come.

That a measure of social security is guaranteed to (almost) everyone is a mere abstraction in face of the fact that all ties of community have been broken in this society, leaving individuals defenseless, families distraught, and most people impoverished, disempowered and condemned to silence. Such, almost always, is the context in which the book is closed on existences lived out under the dictatorship of money. Humanity has become an impracticable idea.

To go into hospital is to fall directly, and more brutally than usual, under the control of the State. One's first means of counterattack in this circumstance is to refuse to feel guilty — completely to reject insinuations of the type "You yourself are responsible for your cancer". By imposing their time-frames on you, your antagonists seek to deprive you of your consciousness. Refusing to accept any guilt is a way of directing all your energy against that dispossession, of imposing yourself as an individual, and of achieving an imperturbability

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In reality I had no choice. I could either allow myself to become a guinea-pig, or escape — and leave this whole little scene to its own devices. My aspirations in life had always been distinct; I was certainly not ready to relinquish control over my own death. But the very fact that I had no choice, that death awaited me in any case, meant that I had to make up my mind immediately. Being human is a risk that has to be run.

Once my decision was made, I was amazed at the calm that came over me. Everything I had repressed returned to the surface and released an astonishing energy of a kind that I had despaired of ever feeling again. I was in harmony with myself at last. I rediscovered a freedom that demanded nothing better than to expand day after day. I had chosen the only path that it was humanly possible to choose.

I had been in bits and pieces. My ambition now was to accomplish the sovereign act of putting my various scattered parts back together, of reassembling myself.

I have started to experiment on myself. Little by little I have come to the conclusion that I am allergic to many things. This has given me

and only the high-tech weaponry remembered in the aftermath; where with impunity a population can be irradiated by a nuclear power station, or made mortally sick (as at Bhopal) by a chemical plant.

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Within the vast laboratory that the commodity world is for itself, medicine has a strategic role to play: its Herculean efforts to fight illness — which is an unconscious protest by the subject — are a way of *concealing the reality of human decline*.

Medicine is utterly under the thumb of commerce. So is the State, which can no longer lay any claim whatsoever to protecting its citizens. If contaminated blood can be knowingly given to hemophiliacs (and the necessary insurance taken out with consummate cynicism beforehand), then there are surely no depths to which medical practice will not sink. Rarely a week goes by without some fresh ignominy of the medical confraternity or of the drug companies appearing in the newspapers. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. There is no getting around it: the commercial imperative shamelessly sweeps all other considerations before it. Medicine kills.

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We no longer hear our bodies when they speak to us; what is more, modern society obliges us to treat the body as an abstraction. Otherwise how could we possibly endure such living conditions? The body cannot be abused as the mind is; the Mind can be constrained to treat the body as an abstraction, but the body is a blind entity never “brought to see reason”. Its very blindness opens the door to the truth. Our bodies can do what our misled consciousness can do no longer: they can react.

A day came when death set its mark upon the tip my breast. For years I had nicknamed my nesh and retractile nipples “my inward eyes”; little did I know that just behind one of them there lurked a tumor. People never evince great surprise when they learn that they have cancer: there are so many possible causes! It is futile to try and pick

Stage III is covered by no kind of convention, national or international. In view of the failures that have gone before in all these cases, a high level of attrition is considered acceptable. There is a so-called “compassionate” protocol which allows “last-chance volunteers”, for whom all other treatments have failed, to participate in these experiments; as well as selling the number of candidates for risky trials of this kind, such “unofficial” guinea-pigs can be used without being figured into the overall failure statistics.

The compound that was supposed to be tried out on me had in fact been tested previously, then abandoned on account of its numerous side-effects. These included the arrest of saliva production (hardly recommended in my case, given that I was also suffering from lung cancer!), falling white and red blood cell counts, reduced platelet production, kidney and liver complications, etc., etc. The research was being conducted by Sanofi Laboratories, a subsidiary of the Elf Aquitaine corporation, notorious for having lied on the extent of the action, and hushed up the side-effects, of the drugs it was marketing. So what if patients were paralyzed as a result? The competition is enormous...

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Attacked in his essence, experiencing the absence of communication in total isolation, the individual subject must struggle with whatever confronts him — with his own character, with his sickness whether or not yet manifest — and he must do so without perspective, without the capacity for reflective thought. You have a medical condition, that condition holds sway, and you are powerless with respect both to yourself and to your dear ones. This is the time, typically, when the subject may “bow to the inevitable” when the loss of the will to live may become a clinically discernible phenomenon.

The emergence of the illness is the moment when official recognition is given, as much by the patient as by medical science, to the *fact* that the individual is damaged, but not to the *logic* that has occasioned this damage. On the contrary, medicine first goes in search of the single causal agent supposedly responsible for the condition — the virus, micro-organism, behavioral risk factor, or what-have-you. And when, as in the

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Once all these treatment efforts have failed, the patient enters what is called Stage III. At this stage treatment is not therapeutic but strictly experimental. I did not want to submit to this, and I left. I had never before been the object of such a concerted effort to hand me over, bound hand and foot, to the mercies of the pharmaceutical conglomerates. True, I had already become a guinea-pig. The international dimension of the norms laid down in the protocols is just a smokescreen. You would have to be mad to expect protection from the State — much less from several States in cahoots with each other! It is hardly reassuring to know that millions of people are experiencing the same thing as you. And I am not a fool. All the same, over the years I had witnessed revisions in the chemotherapy protocols, which had become more tolerable both in terms of lower (and hence less toxic) dosages and in terms of gentler administration methods. I had also been mollified by the attentions of a genuinely devoted team of nurses and by the personality of a woman doctor of the old school. I had a measure of

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Even those who have no faith in the system have no power to affect it, for nothing else exists. You flail about wildly as you strive for even a minimal influence on the doctors' decisions. In a letter to the surgeon who was to operate on me, I explained how I felt about my body: "I will seem ten years younger than my age, and this is not by chance", I wrote, and "My tits are everything to me; my entire sexuality is contained in them", etc., etc. When the day came, this surgeon announced to me that, once he had cut open my breast, he "reserved the right" (!!!), if need be, to remove it completely. I thereupon insisted that a woman doctor I knew be present at the operation and went out to get a cup of coffee. At least the proceedings were put off for that day. I was determined not to place myself so

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You are given to understand that your treatment is tentative only. There are other drugs, of course — something can certainly be done in your case. With but slight variations, the treatments are all much alike, and standardized, until you reach "Stage III". The chemotherapy itself may generate new cancerous cells. In the aftermath of treatment, a karyotype⁷ will show the chromosomal breaks it has caused; the broken bits can join up again any old how, thus constituting new malignant cells.

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This world has given you a life sentence — or a death sentence — you have obviously committed a crime against yourself, and who else will protect you in that case?

And let's not forget: OFFICIAL MEDICINE, ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE — THE SAME FIGHT! Everywhere it's the same refrain: "You poor thing, you've really done yourself in, haven't you" (Yes, right — and *you* are the one that needs your head examined!)

Post-treatment — that is, after a general anesthetic and surgery, followed by a standardized course of extra-powerful radiation — your fatigue tends to overcome your vigilance. This is the moment when medicine gets started on its major irreversible plans for you. Its authoritarianism penetrates your defenses, and you lose the capacity to catch all the lies. In company with your immune system, you are

Between the first regimen and the second there is supposedly a "window of therapeutic opportunity." When the costs and benefits of chemotherapy are compared, one can only be skeptical as to whether the benefits tip the scales. Unless, of course, we are talking about the readily identifiable benefits that go into the pockets of the drug companies.

We are confronted here by the same repressive logic that holds sway in the nuclear industry — the same would-be radical demand for immediate results, the same declaration of a state of emergency, the same contempt for long-term consequences, for the future in general. You live longer — ergo, science is effective. You want a cure? Well, that's your problem, not ours. Surely you don't think the entire atmosphere ought to be cleaned up just because your little lungs have a hard time dealing with air pollution?

"Anyway, it's high time you acknowledge how much we have done for you." In other words, we are expected to thank them humbly for allowing us to benefit from their hyper-sophisticated paraphernalia. This is the world upside down! The fact is that our tumors are their bread and butter, and the nuclear lobby,

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a rape, since all your muscles have been tetanized. This is an unpardonable crime against our love lives, an invisible mutilation of our sensuality and our desires. Damnable and murderous medicine! And to think that I asked that my tit be left as intact as possible for the sake of love! What a dope! (“Surely you wouldn’t rather die than lose a breast?”) Damn them! For years afterwards they were always asking me whether I had been castrated in this way, just in case I hadn’t, so that they could recommend it. Damn them to hell!

Practically none of the women who have been deceived in this way will ever talk about it, so deeply buried is the emotional pain of this peculiar, alien and gratuitous form of impotence. Nothing could be better designed to aggravate their isolation. *High security inside body!* It doesn’t matter how *old* a woman is, in the normal way she will still experience sexual pleasure...

In any case I seriously doubt whether this approach really has any effect on the growth rate of tumors. Show us the statistics! After all, the fact of being young yet menopausal must surely alter the hormonal balance of the entire organism, not least the bones. And when you learn that the logical evolution of hormonal

get there. In the interim, I went through many new ordeals with the chemotherapy. Each time, though, I emerged better armed for the fray. The disease, of course, continued on its merry way. I submitted to two chemotherapy protocols, looking upon them as experiments. In my own mind, at the time, I felt I was prolonging things. And it is true that I had developed an insatiable thirst for life, and I felt no urgency; I enjoyed every instant to the utmost, wherever I happened to be. I am inclined now to think that spinning out time was *all* I was doing. For was I not at the same time irreversibly “limiting” my life?⁵

I would always put on a big show of recovering, quickly after an examination or a chemo session. I did this out of defiance, up to a point, but most of all because I needed to shield myself from the impact of this latest assault. I was like a vampire in my desperate search for new strength. I learnt how to tune out my surroundings altogether, concentrate hard, and draw comfort from sounds almost completely drowned out by the din of the traffic: a bird singing, for example, or a distant conversation between two little girls. What was it that that bird or those children were saying to me?

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a rape, since all your muscles have been tetanized. This is an unpardonable crime against our love lives, an invisible mutilation of our sensuality and our desires. Damnable and murderous medicine! And to think that I asked that my tit be left as intact as possible for the sake of love! What a dope! (“Surely you wouldn’t rather die than lose a breast?”) Damn them! For years afterwards they were always asking me whether I had been castrated in this way, just in case I hadn’t, so that they could recommend it. Damn them to hell!

Practically none of the women who have been deceived in this way will ever talk about it, so deeply buried is the emotional pain of this peculiar, alien and gratuitous form of impotence. Nothing could be better designed to aggravate their isolation. *High security inside body!* It doesn’t matter how *old* a woman is, in the normal way she will still experience sexual pleasure...

In any case I seriously doubt whether this approach really has any effect on the growth rate of tumors. Show us the statistics! After all, the fact of being young yet menopausal must surely alter the hormonal balance of the entire organism, not least the bones. And when you learn that the logical evolution of hormonal

So much of the new and hyper-sophisticated equipment in hospitals is based on nuclear technology; that is why it becomes obsolete so quickly. The ultimate aim is that this technology should effectively replace surgery. You will never meet a hospital doctor willing to tell you about the tumors produced by radiation techniques themselves. A relapse on the patient's part is invariably given as the reason for any new growths. Radiation-pushing bigwigs in hospitals may no more be taken to task for the consequences of their onslaughts than society at large may be held to account for the doses of radioactivity that everyone now receives in the ordinary course of life. Moreover, these bigwigs have managed to make themselves unavoidable; in the case of bone disease, in particular, there is simply no other alternative, and before long they will have a complete monopoly on the treatment of brain tumors. You may not be at risk from a slipping scalpel, but an inattentive technician is every bit as lethal. (Recall the recent "Saragossa scandal", in which doctors, technicians and lab workers were all implicated in the purely negligent administration of excessive radiation to patients over a fifteen-day period.) Like me,

information. Before long I had effectively gone on the offensive.

My life now resided in this acknowledgment of my death in prospect. I had become a warrior. Instead of wriggling to escape, I had begun to fight actively — distancing myself not as a defense but for strategic reasons. I was always on the lookout. The thoroughly real and concrete threat of the cops had made it possible for me to regroup and confront a much more diffuse and incomprehensible danger. And in the process the social dimension of my illness became clear.

Sickness had slowed me down. The cops were hot on my trail, and I was like some wounded prey. My white blood cells, meanwhile, whose number refused to grow, were the true gauge of my defenses, my immunity. Very likely a "metastatic flare-up" was just around the corner. The parallel between the two trains of events concentrated my mind. I was acutely aware of the idea of death, but instead of becoming obsessed with death's imminence I felt only indifference. Flight was useless. My death, I told myself, was social, and had to be made social. Fear and anxiety faded as I became more detached, and now my detachment was

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had been hanging over my head like a sword of Damocles. But it is one thing to recognize a probability mentally and quite another to know for sure that it is graven into your flesh and bones. There is no more getting away from it. You are living a tragedy in the immediate, and no distantiation is possible. You are like a fly caught in a honey jar. Except that it is not honey that you have to swallow, but poison. This time around, I accepted all their foul prescriptions — the very ones that I had got out of before. It took them a month and a half to convince me, but in the end I capitulated, simply because one doctor spoke to me honestly. I was seduced by his words — medical words that I had learnt from my own reading: “two lymph nodes out of a possible six affected... if a third goes, we go to chemo; one tumor measuring 2.5 centimeters... 3 centimeters means chemo.” And so forth. Yet these were not my words, these were not my criteria...

I had an allergic reaction to the treatment right from the start. In the six months that followed it became apparent that the experiment would have to be halted. My white blood cell count was too low and refused to rise, so the regimen was abandoned. It was during this same

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I had refused chemotherapy after the surgery. The side-effects of the radiation were already such an enormous price to pay. Most of all, I tried to put the whole nightmare behind me as quickly as I could by obliging myself to resume my former activity, albeit at a somewhat gentler pace so as to husband my energy. Putting things on hold, or somehow putting my life in brackets, were intolerable ideas. And what could be more debilitating than continually thinking about death: I defied my illness by ignoring it, by trying to erase it from my mind — even, if possible, from my friends' minds.

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